

Library life in Australia: It Has Been a Busy Year!

Abstract: The strength and vibrancy of the Australian library sector is explored in this article. The concepts of developing, i.e. growing and maturing as an industry, and sustaining, i.e. supporting and maintaining the quality of library services, thread through the discussions about the events and activities that have shaped the library profession, library advocacy initiatives and the future generation of librarians.

Keywords: Libraries, library profession, new professionals, library design, advocacy, Australia

Das Bibliotheksleben in Australien: Ein ereignisreiches Jahr!

Zusammenfassung: Im vorliegenden Artikel wird über die Stärken und Ereignisse im australischen Bibliothekssektor berichtet. Das Konzept des steten Wachstums – gleich des Wachstums und des Ausbaus in der Industrie – und der Zukunftsfähigkeit – Erhalt und Verbesserung des Serviceangebots der Bibliotheken bspw. – wird anhand von wichtigen Events und Diskussionen, die den Blick auf den Berufsstand des Bibliothekars und auf Initiativen auf dem Bibliothekssektor schärften, aufgezeigt.

Schlüsselwörter: Bibliotheken, Bibliothekar, neue Berufsbilder, Bibliotheksdesign, Australien

1 Introduction

Australians are great travellers – they have to be! Australia is down at the bottom right hand corner of the world map. It takes almost 24 hours to travel the 17,000 km by air to Europe, which is almost fifty times faster than it was when the journey was made by ship over fifty years ago. As a country, Australia itself is expansive: it takes five hours to fly from Sydney on the east coast to Perth on the west coast. This is about the same duration as flying from Frankfurt to Tehran - but without the significant cultural differences between the two places. Once you disembark from the plane in Perth, you find that everyone still speaks the same language and buys the same products in the same supermarkets and chain stores using the same currency.

However, these great distances do not deter Australians: in 2016 around 8.4 million people, that is about one third of the population, travelled internationally for work or for holidays. Naturally, to balance this, there are also over 8 million international visitors coming to Australia each year,

including 200,000 Germans. On top of this, there were almost 62 million domestic airline passengers. Australians really are great travellers.

All this travel, along with immediate access to information and the media, allows people all across Australia to develop valuable national and international perspectives, with library and information professionals up there with the best of them. Not only are Australian librarians increasingly aware of the challenges and opportunities facing their colleagues in other countries, but they are also keen to ensure that their profession remains vibrant and strong into the future. Like many professional communities, the Australian library sector demonstrates the importance of variety and diversity, with ongoing opportunities for collaboration and networking.

If some readers in Germany are not familiar with the Australian library scene, this article provides brief insights into some aspects of professional life in this country. However, if other readers already have connections with Australian librarians, then the article presents them with a snapshot of just some of the main activities and events that have taken place over the past year. The concepts of developing, i.e. growing and maturing as an industry, and sustaining, i.e. supporting and maintaining the quality of library services, thread through the discussions about the library profession, about library advocacy initiatives and about the future generation of librarians.¹

2 Developing and sustaining the library and information profession

While some librarians complain that their profession has been defined by the physical building, the library, rather than by their own professional identity, others argue that a library without a librarian is just a shed of books. Although the sector needs to continually lobby to promote the value of librarians and their specialised skillsets, Australia has not lost sight of the importance of the library as place. An exciting new initiative launched in 2017 by the Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA): the **ALIA Library Design Awards**.²

The awards have been introduced to not only showcase the innovative architectural ideas and interior design achievements in library buildings, but also to highlight the significant investment being made by governments and institutions across Australia. There are four different award categories plus an additional popular vote award. A total of 33 nominations were received, with the top awards going to the City of Perth Library³ (public library); John Philips Library, Western Sydney

¹ The author would like to thank Sue McKerracher, Chief Executive Officer of the Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA) and Jan Richards, Chair of the Australian Public Library Alliance (APLA) and Chair of the IFLA Public Libraries Section Standing Committee, for their valuable ideas about the highlights of library life in Australia over the past year.

² <https://www.alia.org.au/awards/library-design-awards-2017>.

³ <https://www.perth.wa.gov.au/living-community/city-perth-library/city-perth-library>.

University (academic library); Arup, Sydney (special library) and Hanly Learning Centre, St Joseph's Nudgee College in Brisbane (school library). The ALIA Members' Choice award was presented to Geelong Library and Heritage Centre in Victoria.⁴



Fig. 1: Geelong Library⁵

The City of Perth Library is recognised as a vibrant community hub, melding contemporary architecture with the historical buildings of Cathedral Square in the centre of the city. The warm atmosphere in the seven-storey cylindrical building has been created through the use of native Australian timbers and filtered sunlight, with the eye drawn up to the ceiling feature which presents the artist Andrew Nicholls' visual interpretation of Shakespeare's play, *The Tempest*, from a Western Australian perspective (City of Perth, 2016).



Fig. 2: City of Perth Library⁶

⁴ <http://www.grlc.vic.gov.au/glhc>.

⁵ Image of <http://www.grlc.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/about%20the%20dome.jpg>.

The Lord Mayor has described the Library as the city's lounge room: a welcoming meeting place for the people of Perth, echoing the idea that modern libraries have moved from being transactional places to relational places.⁷ As the City of Perth Library aims to meet the needs of a wide range of users and visitors, the space has been creatively designed to provide active learning spaces as well as quiet reflective areas. Social interaction is encouraged with the café, outdoor terrace area, meeting rooms and flexible function spaces.

The professional dimensions of library design were the focus of the Library Design Awards Conference, held at the striking Library at The Dock⁸ in Melbourne on 19 June 2017.⁹ Speakers at the conference included urban planners, architects, interior designers and library managers, who shared their different perspectives about the value of civic and cultural spaces and the symbiotic relationship between good design and high quality user experiences. To learn more about the growing interest in and commitment to outstanding library design, visit the Library Design Awards Conference website and the Australian Library Design Awards gallery.

Every two years, information professionals from Australia, New Zealand and the Asia Pacific region gather in Sydney for the **ALIA Information Online** conference.¹⁰ The theme of the 2017 forum, held in early February, was *Data | Information | Knowledge*. As Information Online has long been recognised as a barometer for future practice, it attracts speakers and delegates from very different areas of the profession. There were opportunities to learn about how to leverage the use of technology to explore and test new approaches to designing, developing and delivering programs and services, with data as a key resource to be exploited in different ways.

Papers discussed data analytics, data visualisation, linked data, metadata and data sharing in the contexts of geosciences, digital humanities and business resources, to highlight the critical importance of collaboration, connection and creation involving multiple stakeholders. The online world continually stimulates new ways of looking at libraries, with an ever-growing focus on innovation, experimentation and prototyping to reconceptualise the ways that digital resources are managed and used. The Information Online conference program was augmented by a number of interactive workshops encouraging librarians to adopt some of the new approaches to the curation of resources in the ever-evolving digital environment.

⁶ <https://www.alia.org.au/sites/default/files/City%20of%20Perth%20Library%204.JPG>.

⁷ Vestergaard (2018).

⁸ <http://www.melbourne.vic.gov.au/community/hubs-bookable-spaces/the-dock/library-at-the-dock/Pages/library-at-the-dock.aspx>.

⁹ https://www.alia.org.au/sites/default/files/documents/2017-06-09%20Library%20Design%20Awards%202017%20Revised%20program_0.pdf.

¹⁰ <https://informationonline17.alia.org.au>.

In mid March, some of these ideas were further explored through the lens of the public library sector at the **STEAM into Sydney** event¹¹ which was held as part of the mid-term meeting of the International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA) Public Libraries Section Standing Committee.¹² The conference theme examined the roles that public libraries can play to support the STEAM (science, technology, engineering, arts and mathematics) agenda in innovative ways.

With over 100 delegates representing 11 countries, the relevance of the two-day program was indisputable: it was fully subscribed within four hours of the announcement being made. The opportunity to participate in the conference was extended through live streaming, with presentations subsequently made available via YouTube. Speakers from across Australia, New Zealand, Norway and Canada shared their ideas and experiences about how innovative programming could transform the ways in which libraries engaged with their communities.

There was also a major takeaway from the conference: the advisory body ALIA Australian Public Library Alliance (APLA), produced an attractive report presenting a series of case studies about how public libraries in Australia and overseas have become successful centres for lifelong learning for all ages, thanks to the investment of local government and the creative skills and expertise of public library staff (ALIA APLA, 2017).

Many Australian libraries employ library technicians who have studies lead to the Diploma of Library and Information Services from one of the vocational programs accredited by ALIA. Library technicians enjoy their own professional forum, the **ALIA National Library and Information Technicians Symposium**,¹³ which is held every two years. In September 2017 the symposium was held in Sydney with the very appropriate theme of *Bridge to Knowledge*. Technology within the context of the library technician's career was the main thread through the formal presentations, with presentations on digitisation, digital heritage, metadata, digital literacy, and the digital divide. The symposium also provided the participants to discuss their areas of interest informally with colleagues and to share ideas about contemporary issues in library work.

Another specialised forum on the Australian conference calendar is **RAILS: Research Applications, Information and Library Studies**.¹⁴ This is an annual conference which brings together library educators, researchers and practitioners to build an integrated culture of research-driven practice and practice-focussed research. The theme of the 2017 event, hosted by the University of South

¹¹ <https://steamintosydney.wordpress.com>.

¹² STEAM into Sydney <https://steamintosydney.wordpress.com> and video presentations https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCDVM8JHITIdSs_FU9Sa89gw/videos.

¹³ <https://www.alia.org.au/LibTech>.

¹⁴ <https://railsconference.com/rails-2017>.

Australia in Adelaide in late November, sought to tease out some of the key issues impacting on contemporary LIS education - *Creating and Learning Together: Interdisciplinary Teaching and Research*.

The first day of the RAILS meeting was dedicated to topics relating to teaching, continuing education and professional development, plus a doctoral consortium for students; the research-practice nexus was discussed during the second day. While several papers outlined the value and impact of academics and practitioners collaborating on applied research activities in different types of library and information service, delegates got a strong sense of the challenges that made partnerships difficult. Not only did academics feel that their growing workload made them increasingly time-poor, but also practitioners believed that the rapidly changing library environments they had to deal with left little opportunity for any research activities.

On the international front, Australian librarians are certainly making their mark. Their growing involvement in IFLA has been marked by Christine Mackenzie being chosen as IFLA President-elect of IFLA, ready to step into the role of President in 2019. Beyond the work of the Public Libraries Standing Committee discussed earlier in this article, 18 Australians currently serve on IFLA committees, including no fewer than seven past Presidents of ALIA and three Board Directors. Despite the great distances involved, the number of Australians attending the IFLA World Library and Information Congress has been climbing, with now over 60 regular delegates. This level of interest has resulted in the establishment of an official **IFLA Australian Caucus**.



Fig. 3: IFLA Australian caucus¹⁵

¹⁵ https://www.alia.org.au/sites/default/files/documents/IMG_5257%20%28003%29_1.JPG.

The Caucus, which meets in the host city immediately prior to the annual social event, the Australian and Friends IFLA Dinner, allows delegates to gain a collective understanding of the wide range of activities their colleagues are involved in. Members of ALIA play an active role in a number of projects, including the IFLA Global Vision, Library Map of the World, Building Strong Library Associations (BSLA) and the International Advocacy Programme (IAP) to support the UN2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The Australian library sector has made a conscientious commitment to the environmental principles that are central to the SDGs by amending the professional association's constitution. While the free flow of information and ideas is integral to "a thriving culture, economy, environment and democracy" (ALIA Object (a)), looking to the future, the library profession must also provide leadership. An additional Object was introduced in the constitution: "to endorse the principles of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights Article 19 and the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals in response to the many challenges faced by the world today and into the future" (ALIA Object (f)) (ALIA, 2017a, p.6).

As well as hosting a meeting of Professions Australia in Canberra to accelerate the understanding about SDGs amongst different professional groups, ALIA has held discussions with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) and published a detailed report, with case studies, to outline the powerful roles libraries can and do play: **Australian libraries support the Sustainable Development Goals** (ALIA, 2018).

Funding was made available through the IFLA IAP project to host a regional summit to encourage a shared understanding of how the SDGs can be embedded in the library sector, particularly to ensure public access to information, to preserve and provide access to cultural heritage and to promote universal literacy. The one-day **ALIA Asia-Pacific Sustainable Development Goals Summit**¹⁶ will be held at the end of July 2018 as a satellite event before another important international initiative, the inaugural **Asia-Pacific Library and Information Conference (APLIC)**¹⁷ 2018. This is a conference being organised collaboratively by ALIA, Library and Information Association of New Zealand Aotearoa (LIANZA) and Library Association of Singapore (LAS). The conference will provide the opportunity for the Australian library community to open its doors to colleagues from neighbouring countries in order to discuss issues from the perspectives of the immediate region.

¹⁶ <https://www.alia.org.au/news/15995/sustainable-development-goals-summit-2018>.

¹⁷ <https://aplic.alia.org.au>.

Further regional support is achieved through the **INELI-Oceania leadership program**¹⁸ which strives to foster and develop emerging leaders in public libraries. The program is based on the International Network of Library Innovators (INELI) project led by Global Libraries with funding from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. Program partners for INELI-Oceania include ALIA, LIANZA and National and State Libraries of Australasia (NSLA). Each cohort of participants is involved in the program for two years: they all meeting up at the beginning and at the end of the period and are required to complete seven online learning modules with the support of a mentor. Members of the present and previous cohorts have shared their stories on the INELI-Oceania website, highlighting the fact that this is another safe space for experimenting with new ideas and playing with innovative approaches to community development.

3 Developing and sustaining library advocacy

The many events which are held around Australia certainly encourage librarians to engage with their profession. However, it is also critical that the profession looks outwards. Librarians collaborate on a number of national advocacy activities, as well as leading some very targeted campaigns, to raise awareness about and actively promote the really positive role libraries can play in the communities they serve.

There is an ongoing need to ensure that the specialised skillsets of qualified librarians and library technicians are recognised, that the important part libraries play in literacy and learning at all ages is acknowledged, especially through a national early literacy strategy, and that the significant contribution they make to digital inclusion is understood. As the impact of digital technologies continues to grow, it is incumbent on the profession to highlight the intrinsic value of a new national framework for digital access to cultural collections, the importance of expanding of the open movement to improve access to scholarly information and research data, and the imperative to promote further copyright reforms.

It is widely acknowledged that Australians love their libraries. For several years, librarians have hijacked St Valentine's Day (14 February) to make it their own special day – **Library Lovers' Day**¹⁹ – when anyone and everyone connected with a library can show and share their love. Librarians find many creative ways to inject a touch of romance, from love hearts and endearing messages left on special books, 'blind dates' with an author's work, 'read dating' to be introduced to new authors or a fresh genre of writing. Popular authors pen love letters to their own library and politicians have even sung their praise of libraries in Parliament. The theme opens up plenty of opportunities to use social

¹⁸ <http://www.inelioceania.net>.

¹⁹ <https://www.alia.org.au/libraryloversday>.

media coverage to advantage: the #libraryloversday hashtag trended at number 2 on Twitter in Australia, then moved out across the world.



Fig. 4: Love letters²⁰

One of the major events on the advocacy agenda is **Library and Information Week** (LIW) which falls in late May every year. LIW provides all librarians with the opportunity to showcase their resources, facilities, services, programs and events, and to engage with their clients in new and fun ways. ALIA produces a toolkit with guidance about drafting effective media releases and working productively with the media, provides professional graphic design resources for print and digital materials, and makes a range of branded merchandise available, including posters, bookmarks, stickers and pencils.

Each year LIW has a special theme to help shape ideas and activities across the country. In 2017, the theme was '*Celebrate*' – a very valid excuse to celebrate ALIA's 80th birthday. As a strategy to demonstrate the collective value of libraries, one day was dedicated to celebrating Australia's most borrowed books. ALIA partnered with Civica, the leading library management system in public libraries, to extract the loans data from participating libraries to profile the most borrowed books across a range of categories. This strategy not only underscores the value of literacy and reading, but also emphasises the wide reach that different libraries have in their respective communities.

LIW always includes some light hearted fun activities, of course, and on 26 May 2017, librarians were invited to celebrate ALIA's 80th birthday, quite literally, in style. This meant rather than challenging the stereotypical image of the librarian, they should dress up for work as librarians would have done in 1937.

²⁰ <https://www.alia.org.au/sites/default/files/LLD%202018%20Webpage%20graphic.jpg>.



Fig. 5: Kyla Stephan

The strong focus on literacy and reading in LIW is further promoted through **National Simultaneous Storytime** (NSS).²¹ Each year, one lovely Australian picture book is selected for a collective reading, at a given time on a given day, across the whole country. On 24 May 2017, around 600,000 children (along with many adults too) at over 3,500 locations participated in the storytime presentation of *The Cow Tripped Over the Moon*, written by Tony Wilson and illustrated by Laura Wood.



Fig. 6: Storytime²²

The publishers supported the NSS program by making print and digital resources freely available to participants, libraries shared ideas about their publicity strategies and storytime activities, and a theatre company created a hip-hop interpretation of the rhyme and rhythm of the book. The NSS campaign always involves a number of high profile 'VIP readers' including political leaders, media personalities and sports stars, who are invited to be the actual storyteller at different venues. The ambitious goal for 2018 is to see over one million Australians involved in NSS.

²¹ <https://www.alia.org.au/national-simultaneous-storytime-2017>.

²² https://www.alia.org.au/sites/default/files/NSS%202017%20Web%20page%20banner_0.jpg.

The focus on lifting literacy rates across the entire community returns later in the year with **The Reading Hour**.²³ Australian of all ages are simply encouraged to pick up a book – any book – at any time of the day or night and read for an hour. This allows the industry to address issues like low levels of adult literacy, problems relating to workplace literacy, and the importance of library services to new migrants.

The campaign, timed for 14 September 2017, saw ALIA's strong cross-industry connections with other key agencies, including the Australian Authors Society, the Australian Literary Agents Association, the Australian Publishers Association, the Australian Booksellers Association and the Copyright Agency Limited. This opened up wonderful opportunities to promote the campaign not only through libraries, but also bookshops and many organisations involved in writing, literacy and reading.

Community partnerships are clearly a key dimension of advocacy across the library sector. The Cancer Council's major – and most popular – fundraising event is coincidentally scheduled for late May, so it coincides very nicely with LIW. Australia's Biggest Morning Tea involves hosting a get together for friends or colleagues over a cup of tea and a treat; libraries, of course, can provide the ideal venue for hosting a big morning tea to support the charity's fundraising activities. Like NSS, **Libraries Celebrate Australia's Biggest Morning Tea** makes a collective statement for action: last year, the library sector made a very real contribution towards the \$12 million raised through the campaign to support cancer research.

The event provides librarians, whether working in a public library, academic library, special library or school library, with a positive and generous way to build linkages with their immediate communities. The willingness to donate to a very worthy charity can also provide individuals with a new reason to connect with their local library.

These advocacy activities – Library and Information Week, Library Lovers' Day, National Simultaneous Storytime, Australian Reading Hour and Australia's Biggest Morning Tea – all help keep the wider community aware of the roles that library services play across Australia and the value they bring to the whole of society. Beyond this, however, there are also some very targeted campaigns to highlight specific issues of concern that require the commitment of and real action from many parties. In 2017, there was a strong focus on a range of issues: copyright law reform, digital inclusion, the digital economy, a national research infrastructure in Australia and digital access to cultural collections.

²³ <https://www.alia.org.au/events/14787/2017-reading-hour>.

The fact that the library sector faces the difficult task of working on many different, yet often related, issues stimulated the development of a more coordinated approach to lobbying and advocacy. As ALIA has long believed that the free flow of information and ideas is a key tenet of a democratic society, the common thread for advocacy was **Freedom of Access to Information and Resources (FAIR)**.²⁴ The FAIR website provides Australian library stakeholders with a central resource on policy matters impacting on library services which can encourage and support active participation. There is also a Facebook site, a Twitter account and a newsletter.

The FAIR concept resonates strongly with the push for copyright law reform: under Australian legislation, certain provisions relate to ‘fair dealing’ permissions for libraries, but there has been a push for ‘fair use’ to allow for more flexible, technology-neutral provisions that would allow people to fit in with the spirit of the law, rather than being bound by rules and regulations. A couple of years’ ago, the need to raise awareness about the complexities of the current copyright legislation led to the **Cooking for Copyright** campaign.²⁵

Many libraries, archives, museums and historical societies were asked to share interesting handwritten recipes; these were posted to the FAIR website and Australians were simply invited to cook one of the recipes and share their creations for colleagues and friends. This action of posting the handwritten recipes online was in itself a breach of the Copyright Act 1968. The legal situation was that copyright restrictions for unpublished works, with the handwritten recipes as an example, lasted forever, meaning that cultural agencies were not allowed to digitise any unique resources and share them online. The country’s rich heritage was effectively trapped and stifled by the laws of the land. The Cooking for Copyright campaign for change meant that traditional and social media channels certainly ‘cooked up a storm’!

The campaign was indeed a recipe for real change. Amendments to the copyright law were drafted, passed by Parliament, and introduced in mid 2017. The amendments to the legislative provisions relating to unpublished works brought them in line with the copyright requirements for published works. Millions of unpublished manuscripts, letters and drawings held in cultural institutions were suddenly free to access and use. The amending legislation also ensured further reforms also enabled vastly improved access to materials by people with print disabilities, in line with the Marrakesh Treaty. The new legislation meant that it was time for librarians to celebrate: what better than to promote another day of Cooking for Copyright featuring some of Australia’s favourite recipes. Fair enough!

²⁴ <https://fair.alia.org.au>.

²⁵ <https://fair.alia.org.au/cookingforcopyright>.

Other advocacy activities have focused on the development of a national framework for digital access to Australia's collections, with the goal of providing open access to a wide range of Australian content that have been digitised. The work is coordinated by GLAM Peak, which represents the united peak bodies of galleries, libraries, archives and museums. Stage 1 of the **Digital Access to Collections** initiative²⁶ received funding through the Catalyst, the Australian Arts and Culture Fund, to facilitate the development of the national framework and an associated toolkit which provides practical support to any cultural agencies involved in collecting digital resources, undertaking digitisation projects and providing online access to their collections to local, national and international audiences.

Further Catalyst funding, along with in-kind support from the members of GLAM Peak, sees the rollout of a series of professional development workshops across the country to build the capacity of the GLAM sector and to facilitate the transfer of knowledge between institutions. It is hoped that sustainability will be achieved through the development and alignment of state and territory digital plans. This national framework represents a further opportunity for a strategic and collaborative approach to the work that libraries are already involved in, linking smaller local initiatives with Trove, the amazing digital discovery platform coordinated by the National Library of Australia.

The breadth and depth of library advocacy activities in Australia are underpinned by supporting resources, toolkits and communications strategies. A series of materials that can be used as posters or handouts capture ten critical ways that different types of libraries add value to their specific communities. The series commenced with **10 steps to a successful lobbying campaign**,²⁷ a succinct how-to guide for librarians to stimulate discussion and planning about the role they can all play as advocates. This was followed by **10 ways that libraries power Smart Cities**²⁸ which presents the key attributes of successful public libraries, including award-winning design, digital access, literacy etc, thus serving almost as a concise index to many of the activities the libraries and their partners are actively involved in. The difference that libraries make to schools comes to the fore in **10 ways that libraries power high performance schools**.²⁹ The Australian School Library Association (ASLA), along with State-based member associations, works extensively in this space.

ALIA has produced additional resources to outline the contribution made by health libraries in **10 ways that library and information services power the health sector**³⁰ and the role of special

²⁶ <http://www.digitalcollections.org.au>.

²⁷ <https://www.alia.org.au/sites/default/files/documents/advocacy/Advocacy%20Tools%20website%20PDF.pdf>.

²⁸ <https://www.alia.org.au/10-ways-public-libraries-power-smart-cities>.

²⁹ https://www.alia.org.au/sites/default/files/10%20ways%20Poster%20A3_0.pdf.

³⁰ https://www.alia.org.au/sites/default/files/10%20Ways_LIS%20Power%20Health_print.pdf.

libraries more broadly is promoted in the poster **10 ways libraries power high performance organisations**.³¹

Special libraries have been in the spotlight in Australia. Following a half-day national summit meeting to consider the value, impact and challenges facing the special library sector, research was undertaken to examine the unique role and value of information professionals in special libraries.³² The skills and attributes of special librarians are presented as “unique selling points (USPs)”³³ which are all too often overlooked by the management team in the parent organisation: “While it is argued in some quarters that the proliferation of digital technologies and the ubiquitous nature of information makes the librarian redundant, it is this very proliferation that ensures the librarian to be anything but redundant”.³⁴ The study stresses that in too many organisations, the managers’ focus is limited to the technology itself, i.e. the container and the pipes, while librarians are concerned with the content and the context in which information exists, and ultimately the quality of the information itself.

Further work was completed in a qualitative study involving interviews with senior executives and policy managers in the Commonwealth Government about the future of library and information services to support government staff working in research, policy and regulatory agencies.³⁵ This study reinforces the fact that the digital world presents both challenges and opportunities for library and information professionals, specifically in ensuring strong commitment to evidence-based policy, fostering mature levels of information and digital literacy and driving the move into effective data management. There was an imperative for library and information professionals to focus on communication in order to sell their skillsets (their USPs), to raise their profile and to advocate for higher level representation in their agencies.

4 Developing and sustaining the next generation

The discussion thus far paints a picture of the many ways in which Australian librarians currently engage with professional events and contribute to advocacy activities across the nation. Librarianship is recognised to be a values-driven profession with a relatively mature age demographic in this country. To sustain the vitality and vibrancy of the sector, it is essential that the reality of the retirement of older workers is balanced and refreshed by newcomers. There have been

³¹

<https://www.alia.org.au/sites/default/files/10%20ways%20libraries%20power%20high%20performance%20organisations%20A3.pdf>.

³² Howard (2017).

³³ Howard (2017) 3.

³⁴ Howard (2017) 4.

³⁵ Hallam (2017).

several recent studies into the LIS profession³⁶ which have encouraged the ongoing monitoring of the health of the sector.

Following a period of shrinkage, there are now more positive predictions that the demand for qualified librarians is set to grow again. While the number of jobs for librarians in Australia fell from 14,900 in 2010 to 8,400 in 2015, the number of jobs for library technicians increased over the same period: 9,500 in 2010 to 11,000 in 2015.³⁷ This shift could be attributed to library managers responding to budget cuts in their agencies by downgrading professional roles and employing ‘cheaper’ staff. Over the past couple of years, however, the tide has turned: the number of jobs for library technicians has dropped dramatically and many more jobs are available for those with an LIS degree (Table 1).

Time	Librarians	Library Technicians
2010	14,900	9,500
2015	8,400	11,000
2017	12,500	6,700
2022 (estimated)	14,500	6,700

Table 1: Job data for Librarians and Library Technicians, Australia, 2010–2022

Today there is greater recognition of the need for higher level skill sets across all areas of the workforce. ALIA has reported that the renewed emphasis on skills and qualifications validates the importance of the Certified Professional (CP) scheme, which requires members to commit to ongoing learning and development throughout their career. Under the Professional Development scheme, learning activities can be aligned with a specialisation, reflecting a specific career path, e.g. Research/Academic Specialisation, Public Library Specialisation, or Data Specialisation.

After a nation-wide consultation process in 2013 (ALIA, 2013), ALIA has continued to consider the future directions of the profession. A summary of the trends in education, skills and employment helps to track workforce developments and be prepared for any remedial action (ALIA, 2017c). The professional association, which accredits the educational programs for undergraduate and postgraduate degrees and vocationally-oriented diplomas, has worked with library educators to increase the focus on digital technologies in the curriculum and digital capabilities and business skills as learning outcomes.

Nevertheless, many of the forces impacting on the higher education environment in Australia lie beyond the immediate control of a professional association. Budget cuts, educational rationalism

³⁶ ALIA (2013); ALIA (2017b); Partridge et al. (2011).

³⁷ ALIA (2017c).

and other major factors in the higher education sector have contributed to the closure of several library and information programs, including those offered by Queensland University of Technology, Edith Cowan University, University of Canberra, University of Tasmania and Charles Darwin University (ALIA, 2017c). From 2019, there will no longer be any face-to-face offerings in Queensland, Tasmania, Northern Territory and the Australian Capital Territory. Online courses offered by the remaining six universities with accredited programs will be the only option for future library students in those regions.

Despite the palpable disappointment across the LIS sector, this situation was predicted over a decade ago, when it was argued that there were already too many academic institutions competing for the small number of students seeking to pursue a career in librarianship.³⁸ The vulnerability of individual courses inevitably resulted in an unsustainable predicament. It is hoped that the rationalisation of program offerings across the country will now provide more stable educational pathways into the profession and meet the expected increase in demand for graduates.

On a more positive note, there is growing evidence of greater diversity in the age profile of LIS professional, moving away from the traditional model of students planning a second or even third career. As more younger people are attracted to librarianship, it will be important to ensure they have a career path that remains interesting, rewarding and fulfilling.

Younger Australian library and information professionals channel their energy and talents into the **New Librarians' Symposium** (NLS). NLS was conceived in 2002 as an event created by and for the next generation. NLS8, held in Canberra in June 2017, continued the concept of exploration and experimentation, this time within the career space. The goal was to emphasise the individual's need for self-direction, rather than dependence on others to shape their professional future. *DIY Library Career* was the theme: DIY is the acronym for Do It Yourself. This infers the personal interest and motivation to achieve things independently and resourcefully, without employing experts. In the context of career development, it also embodies the philosophy and culture of makerspaces, library carpentry and collaborative creativity that are increasingly important in libraries.

The NLS conferences provide students and new graduates with the supportive space where they can safely deliver their first conference presentation – or indeed “an interpretative dance, slam poetry session or interactive workshop” as suggested in the call for proposals.³⁹ After the actual event, which naturally had its own online activity via Twitter and Instagram, the conference lives on

³⁸ Hallam (2007).

³⁹ ALIA NLS8 (2016).

through a Figshare channel⁴⁰ for the formal presentations and through a wrap up webpage⁴¹ presenting social media stories curated on the Storify platform and blog posts with the delegates' own personal narratives about their experiences at NLS8.

Social media channels are actively used by ALIA's **New Generation Advisory Committee** (NGAC)⁴² as a strategy to engage new graduate library and information professionals in the life of the association. NGAC is charged with providing guidance to the ALIA Board and staff about issues of direct relevancy to new professionals. NGAC was established as an outcome from the original NLS in 2002 and works collaboratively with the ALIA Students and New Graduates special interest group to promote participation in professional activities. NGAC hosts a monthly professional discussion on Twitter (**#auslibchat**) covering a wide range of topics, including rural and regional library services, technology tools, user experience, pedagogy and learning experience, and meeting the candidates prior to the ALIA Board elections. The tweets are curated and archived on Storify. New library professionals are adept at using technology to keep their ideas flowing.

5 Conclusion

The past year has certainly been another busy one for Australian librarians. The diversity and variety of library architecture, library services and advocacy issues, as discussed in this article, keep the sector vibrant and interesting. This in turn motivates library and information professionals to work together to find creative solutions to the challenges they encounter. While there is a shared desire to move forward and to work towards continuous improvement in the relationships they build and the services they deliver, this is not about change for the sake of change, but rather about recognising the need to ensure that the profession does not stagnate. In a dynamic, rapidly changing environment, librarians must continue to evolve and develop in order to sustain the quality of resources, programs and activities enjoyed by the clients they serve.

The journey continues: the year ahead will undoubtedly bring lots more opportunities for professional interaction both at home and abroad. Australian librarians will welcome their colleagues from the Asia-Pacific region to the APLIC conference in the middle of the year; many will also head overseas to attend and participate in professional events all over the world and make their own contributions to the international library community. If you happen to meet an Australian librarian on your own travels, don't forget to say g'day!

⁴⁰ https://figshare.com/collections/8th_ALIA_New_Librarians_Symposium_2017_-_proceedings/3735556.

⁴¹ <http://nls8.com/wrap-up>.

⁴² <https://www.alia.org.au/NGAC>.

References

ALIA (2013): ALIA's future of the profession. Available at <https://www.alia.org.au/advocacy-and-campaigns/advocacy-campaigns-0/alia-future-profession>.

ALIA (2017a): Constitution of Australian Library and Information Association. Available at https://read.alia.org.au/sites/default/files/documents/2017-05-17_alia_constitution_endorsed_agm_2017.pdf.

ALIA (2017b): ALIA Futures. Available at <https://www.alia.org.au/futureoftheprofession>.

ALIA (2017c): LIS education, skills and employment trend report 2017. Available at <https://www.alia.org.au/employment-and-careers/alia-lis-education-skills-and-employment-trend-report>.

ALIA (2018): Australian libraries support the Sustainable Development Goals. Available at https://www.alia.org.au/sites/default/files/Sustainable%20Development%20Goals%20report_screen.pdf.

ALIA Australian Public Libraries Alliance (APLA) (2017): How public libraries contribute to the STEM agenda 2017. Available at https://read.alia.org.au/sites/default/files/documents/how_public_libraries_contribute_to_the_stem_agenda_2017.pdf.

ALIA New Librarians' Symposium 8 (2016): Call for proposals. Available at <http://nls8.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/NLS8-Call-for-proposals-Jun16.pdf>.

City of Perth (2016): City of Perth Library: Commemorative booklet. Available at <https://www.perth.wa.gov.au/sites/default/files/16-025%20City%20of%20Perth%20Library%20commemorative%20book%20-%2006%20-%20WEB.pdf>.

Hallam, G. (2007): Education for library and information service. In: *Libraries in the 21st century: charting new directions in information services*, ed. by S. Ferguson, 311–36, Wagga Wagga, NSW: Centre for Information Studies, Charles Sturt University.

Hallam, G. (2017): Commonwealth Government Agency Libraries Review. Stage 2 report: Consultation with senior executives and policy managers in government agencies. Available at <https://eprints.qut.edu.au/113973>.

Howard, K. (2017): The unique role and value of information professionals in special libraries. Available at <https://www.alia.org.au/sites/default/files/ALIA%20-%20The%20unique%20role%20and%20value%20of%20information%20professionals%20in%20special%20libraries.pdf>.

Partridge, H. et al. (2011): Re-conceptualising and re-positioning Australian library and information science education for the 21st century. Final report. Available at <https://eprints.qut.edu.au/46915>.

Vestergaard, R. (2018): Modern libraries: moving from a transactional to a relational library. Available at <https://princh.com/modern-libraries-from-a-transactional-to-a-relational-library/#.Wpt8HehuY2w>.



Gillian Hallam

4 Callabonna Street

WESTLAKE Qld 4074

Australia

Gillian.hallam1@bigpond.com